

## Student Perception of Classroom Community in Online and Resident Courses

Robert Vincent Vavala  
Graduate Assistant  
Deana Namuth-Covert, PhD  
Associate Professor  
Department of Agronomy and Horticulture  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Students who feel like part of a classroom community gain more enjoyment and are more academically successful than students who do not feel the same level of community. This study intended to determine if students in online courses perceive the same level of community as students in face-to-face classes and if outside factors impacted community perceptions. The Classroom Community Survey (CCS) was administered to students in three freshman-level classes, each with a face-to-face section and an online section. The CCS consists of 20 questions, measuring overall community and two subscales, connectedness and learning. Possible responses; strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree; were given scores of one through five respectively for a total of one hundred possible points. Eight demographic questions were asked to establish if out-of-class factors affected community scores. Students in face-to-face sections (N=183, M= 58.10) had significantly higher community scores than did their online peers (N=74, M=55.24),  $t(255) = 3.55, P < .05$ . Connectedness scores for students in face-to-face sections were significantly higher than scores for their online counterparts,  $t(255) = 2.81, P < .05$ . Scores for the learning subscale were not significantly different based on course delivery method,  $t(255) = -1.80, n.s.$  Of the demographic questions; gender, age, year in school, number of siblings, size of hometown, grade point average, expected course grade, and is course required or an elective; only the question regarding if the course was required had a significant impact on community scores,  $t(186) = 2.95, P < .05$ . Results of this study showed that face-to-face students perceived significantly higher levels of community than did online students. However, perception of learning, and course grades, according to instructors, were not significantly different for students across delivery methods. Since it was determined that factors outside of the classroom played little role in the formation of students' perception of classroom community, factors inside the classroom need to be addressed to bring levels of community in online courses up to meet those in face-to-face courses.

Robert Vavala  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
383 Plant Sciences Hall  
Lincoln, NE 68583-0724  
rvavala@huskers.unl.edu  
402-209-5355

dcovert2@unl.edu